

ANOMALOPUS PLUTO INGRAM, A POORLY KNOWN SKINK FROM CAPE YORK PENINSULA. *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 32(1): 54. The taxon *Anomalopus pluto* Ingram, 1977, a limbless, fossorial skink was based on a specimen collected at McDonnell crossing, Cockatoo Ck, 115 km S of Bamaga, Cape York Peninsula (11°33'S, 142°26'E) on 14 July, 1975. Since that time, the species has been encountered infrequently.

In 1980, an Australian Museum (AM) party collected 6 specimens on 16–17 July (AMR94360, McDonnell Ck Crossing, 1 km E of main N/S Peninsula road, 11°33'S, 142°27'E; AMR94361-2, R94484-5, R112004, 15 km E of Heathlands settlement on Captain Billy Ck road, 11°45'S, 142°41'E). Eleven years later, 4 specimens of *A. pluto* were collected by officers from the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service (QNPWS). One specimen was collected on 6 September on the road edge during road reconstruction, c. 12 km E of Heathlands ranger base (11°40'06"S, 142°45'30"E). Two days later, 8 to 10 specimens were uncovered in a 30 m² area at Eliot Ck (11°24'40"S, 142°24'43"E) during earth moving activities. Of these, only the three least damaged specimens were collected. In December 1991, QNPWS (Far Northern Region) approached the Queensland Museum (QM) to assess the Eliot Ck *A. pluto* site, an area of proposed redevelopment. I visited Eliot Ck on 18 January 1992 but found no *A. pluto*. However, four specimens were recorded from 3 other localities: 500 m W of Heathlands ranger base (11°45'S, 142°35'E), QMJ54050 (17 Jan.), 54082 (19 Jan.); 1 km E of Heathlands ranger base (11°45'S, 142°36'E), QMJ54083, 54213 (19 Jan.); Captain Billy Ck road, 28.25 km from Heathlands ranger base (11°39'S, 142°44'E) (24 Jan.), one seen but not collected.

Habitats

Ingram (1977) recorded QMJ26261 (the holotype) under leaf litter in a small patch of monsoon forest. AMR94360, from 1 km E of the type locality, was found under a piece of wood on the verge of the road bordering a 'vine and scrub thicket' (Greer & Cogger, 1985). Rainforest communities at the type locality are small, isolated patches on grey loamy sand, surrounded by tall open forest dominated by *Eucalyptus vitrodonta* (David Jones, pers. comm.). AMR94361-2, R94484-5 and R112004 were found in low dense heath on white sand: one beneath a lignotuber and the others from a pile of debris beside a track (Greer & Cogger, 1985). The three QNPWS specimens from Eliot Ck came from tall open forest of mainly bloodwood, stringy barks, *Xanthostemon xerophyllus*, acacias, scattered livistona palms and pandanus, ironwood with a grassy understory and a moderate scattering of shrubs (Mike Provic, pers. comm.). These were within a few metres of a large termite mound in powdery grey sand. The fourth QNPWS specimen came from thick heath on red/yellow powdery sand in *Melaleuca viridiflora*; *Banksia demata*, jacksonias, acacias and xanthorrhoeas scrub (Mike Provic, pers. comm.) with abundant large red termite mounds. QMJ54040 and J54082 were collected in a stand of epacrid scrub (*Leucopogon* sp.), 100 m from a small stream, from grey loamy-sand beneath a small termite-ridden log which supported an active termite mound. QMJ54083, J54213 were in a similar situation but the logs, while termite-ridden, did not support active termite mounds. The specimen from Captain

Billy road was in notophyll vine forest (David Jones, pers. comm.) on grey loamy-sand, in association with a termite-ridden log supporting an active termite mound.

Overall, there appears to be no correlation of vegetation types at collection sites. However, *A. pluto* has always been found in sandy substrates.

Notes

A. pluto is known from 15 preserved specimens in the collections of the QM (5), AM (6) and QNPWS (4). These are from 7 localities, all within the Heathlands area of Cape York Peninsula. Following Thomas & McDonald's (1989) classification, McDonald et al. (1991) assigned *A. pluto* a ranking of 3K because of its limited distribution and the lack of information. However, *A. pluto* localities are within a range of less than 100 km; thus, according to their criteria, a rank of 2K is correct. While it is impossible to assess abundance of *A. pluto*, the many specimens encountered at Eliot Ck suggests that it may be common in areas of favourable habitat.

Little information is available on diet. Stomach contents of QMJ54083 contained only termite fragments, not surprising from the close association between *A. pluto* and active termite nests at several localities. Absence of sand particles in the stomach of QMJ54083 may suggest this specimen had been feeding on termites within their burrows (E. Dahms, pers. comm.). Whether *A. pluto* is a specialist termite feeder or a more general feeder is unknown.

A. pluto has an elongate right lung and no right oviduct. Other lizards that have lost the right oviduct produce a brood size of one and *A. pluto* should also follow this pattern (Greer, 1989).

Tissues from QMJ54213 are deposited in the Evolutionary Biology unit, South Australian Museum.

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